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ABSTRACT

To discover how one student learned to produce writing in different academic contexts, a study documented a Loyola College (Maryland) student's experiences with writing for a poetry class and a biology class during his sophomore year. The subject was interviewed several times, observed, and his voice taped during "writing aloud" sessions as he composed papers, and his papers were analyzed upon return. Results suggested that, because the subject received considerably higher grades in the biology course, he had perceived the requirements and concerns in that course the same way that his instructor had, entering into a successful "written conversation" between instructor and student. His poorer performance in the poetry course appeared partly due to his inability to "figure out" the language of poetry explication. Results also suggested that the subject's success in writing for the biology course depended upon his perceiving the writing as meaningful. The results suggest that, because writing is dependent upon the social context in which it is created, teachers might be wise to understand this and train students to look for contextual cues as to the type of writing they will need to produce, such as (1) a teacher's implicit or explicit instructions about class writing, (2) written texts and models of various sorts, (3) information from other students, (4) a teacher's written and spoken responses to writing attempts, and (5) prior experience. (References and a data collection table included.) (JC)

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A STRANGER IN STRANGE LANDS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A COLLEGE STUDENT WRITING IN TWO ACADEMIC CONTEXTS

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A Stranger in Strange Lands: An Ethnographic Study of a College Student Writing In Two Academic Contexts

This research tells the story of one college student's writing during his freshman, sophomore, and junior years at Loyola College in Baltimore. It is set primarily in three of his classrooms as he works with three teachers from different disciplines, but it includes other locations both on and off campus and numerous other people: friends, teachers, and parents. In this article we will focus on Dave Garrison's writing experiences during his sophomore year in two classes, Introduction to Poetry in the fall and Cell Biology in the spring. Dave is a typical Loyola student, educated in a large Catholic high school in Baltimore, a biology/pre-med major.

The central questions posed in this study concern the nature of writing processes in classrooms. How do they work in those contexts? More specifically, how do students go into a classroom setting and determine what the writing requirements are that discipline and for that teacher and how do they go about producing it? And, further, what characterizes classroom contexts which enhance or deny students' success in this process?

In order to answer these questions I followed Dave and two other Loyola students for four semesters during their freshman, sophomore, and junior years, examining their writing experiences in one class per semester starting with their Freshman Composition class, taught by my colleague in the Writing Department, through their poetry, history, biology, computer, and statistics classes. I focused my attention, first, on the ways these students determined what constituted appropriate writing in each discipline

and, second, on the strategies they used to produce it. In Dave's homlier but familiar terms: "The whole thing is," he said, "You've gotta figure out what the teacher wants and give it to him if you're gonna get the grade."

Successful students are those who can enter a classroom, which often presents them with a brand new speech situation and determine what constitutes appropriate texts in this new territory, what content, stuctures, language, ways of thinking and types of evidence are required in that discipline and by that teacher. They can then produce such a text. Students who cannot do this, for whatever reason--cultural, intellectual, motivational--are those who fail, deemed incompetent communicators in that particular setting.

As I watched these students in one classroom writing situation after another, I came to see them, as they made their liberal arts journey from one discipline to another in their early undergraduate years, as strangers in strange lands. Robert Heinlein's science fiction novel (1961) suggested this metaphor originally. But Heinlein's title is slightly different; his stranger is in a single strange land. These students were strangers in one strange land after another.

This study, then, conceives writing as a communicative act that is, like speaking, heavily dependent upon its context. Both writers and speakers, if they're to communicate successfully, must correctly assess what their readers or hearers know and value, are capable of understanding, how much they're willing to read or hear, and what constitutes appropriate matter and means of presentation in a particular setting.

These are what James Britton calls the rules of the game (1975, p. 76). As students go from one classroom to another, they must play a wide range of games, the rules for which, Britton points out, include many

conventions and presuppositions that are not explicitly articulated. How students determine these rules, some stated explicitly and many more never articulated, and how they play the game is what I investigated in this study.

A key assumption underlying this research is that writing, like speaking, is a social activity. All writing, in this view, is done within in speech communities whose values, traditions, beliefs, and linguistic conventions affect the writer's processes and products. And the writer's work, at the same time, affects and defines the values of the speech community. Drawing its theoretical bases from sociolinguistics and anthropology, this view understands writing as accomplishing meaningful social functions for people in particular contexts.

The context of an utterance is thus seen as being more than just the writer's or speaker's surroundings. The context is, rather, created by the interaction of participants and setting, each affecting and affected by the other in an ongoing process which is, in large part, not consciously articulated. Britton's definition of the context of an utterance is useful here. Drawing on the work of linguist John Lyons, Britton includes in the context of a piece of writing not only relevant external factors, but also the knowledge, both verbal and non-verbal, explicit and tacit, that is shared and generated by people communicating in a particular setting (1975, p. 75).

This assumption that language processes cannot be separated from the contexts in which they occur suggests, of course, that research into these processes must be done in their actual settings. This study of one student's thinking and writing in two classroom communities is indebted to the work of sociolinguist Dell Hymes, a naturalistic researcher who insists that it's not enough to know what a language looks like, to be able to describe and measure it. Rather, he says, "Language should be studied in its social context, in

terms of its organization to serve social ends" (1972a, p. xviii). Particularly useful to the present study is Hymes' concept of the sociocultural organization of the "ways of speaking" (p. xxiv). These "rules of use" are recognized and used, largely without conscious choice, by "communicatively competent" (p. xxxvi) speakers in every speech community. And like speakers, writers must select and create the communication means considered appropriate by the participants in the speech community. Dave Garrison, as he went from class to class, had to define and master the "rules of use" for written discourse in one classroom speech community after another.

How best examine and describe Dave's writing as I conceived it, a language process both cognitive and social, the context and meaning of which were created as participants interacted in various classroom speech communities?

Methods

Analysis of what is obviously so complex a phenomenon as writing must be informed by a number of disciplines (Langer, 1984). This study combines three research methods from three different traditions in order to establish and describe Dave's classroom contexts for writing and get as full a picture as possible of his writing experiences in those contexts. The first method is ethnographic participant observation and interviews, drawn from the tradition of anthropology. The second tool is the composing-aloud protocol, drawn from cognitive psychology. The third is a text analysis method adapted to written discourse from the model of conversation proposed by language philsopher H. P. Grice.

All three methods serve the aim of ethnographic description and

analysis, the data provided by the latter two tools, composing-aloud protocols and text analysis, serving to add to, crosscheck, and refine the data generated by the former, ethnographic observation and interviews. This triangulated approach (Denzin, 1970) provides three windows through which to view Dave's writing experiences, and, taken together, the strengths of one compensating for the limitations of another, they give quite full pictures of those experiences. The chart (Appendix A) gives a full record of the data collection during this two year study. I'll explain briefly how each method was used.

Ethnographic Participant Observation and Interviews. The ethnographic approach to the study of language learning is consistent with my theoretical assumption that language processes are inseparable from the contexts in which they occur. This approach views language holistically, not as a series of discrete skills to be mastered, but as a cultural tool. The ethnographer of writing examines the roles played by writing in the lives of people, asking "What position does writing occupy in the total communicative economy of the society under study, and what is the range of its cultural meanings" (Basso, 1974, p. 432)? The goal of ethnography is "thick description" which is "the intelligible description of people in their cultural context" (Geertz, 1973, p. 15). Ethnographers, who are likely to share phenomenological assumptions about the subjective, and thus multiple, nature of reality, seek to understand how their informants see the world, make sense of their experiences, and generate socially appropriate behaviors. They seek to understand, in short, what members of a community know, explicitly and tacitly, in order to operate in it. As ethnographers collect and examine a variety of data, they are always asking in some way these

questions: What's going on here? And what does this mean to or accomplish for the people involved?

In order to understand and describe the writing in each of Dave's classrooms, how it functioned, and what it meant to people, I became a participant observer in them. My participant role was, in Dave's eyes, a curious combination of teacher and fellow student when we first met in his Freshman Composition class in the spring of 1983. I was observing those composition classes in order learn how my colleague taught the course, the same one I teach at Loyola. As I attended that course week after week, for nine of the fourteen weeks of the semester, I got to know the three young men sitting around me, Dave and his friends, and I realized that I was no longer as interested in understanding what my colleague was teaching as I was in understanding what these students were learning. Thus this study began. As the project progressed, the students saw my role as teacher/inquirer, a person genuinely interested in understanding their writing. In fact, my increasing interest and ability to remember details of his writing experiences seemed at times to mystify and amuse Dave.

In addition to participant observation in Dave's classrooms, I conducted numerous ethnographic interviews of Dave and his teachers, asking them to tell me the story of writing in that setting. Early on I decided to interview the three students together rather than one at a time, a decision that proved to be a good one. The students often talked to and questioned each other, comparing and contrasting their experiences, during our four one-hour long, taped interviews each semester. The three of them together produced more than I believe I ever could have gotten from one-on-one sessions with them. None of these students knows that I've singled Dave out for special attention.

Composing-Aloud Protocols. To add to, crosscheck, and refine my understanding of the data generated by ethnographic participant observation and interviews with teachers and students, I recorded each student as he composed aloud the first draft of his last paper for the course we'd focused on that semester. These protocols provided a valuable second window though which to observe Dave's various classroom writing experiences.

Late in the semester, when these students had had all the time they were going to get to "figure out what the teacher wanted," they came to my office individually for the composing-aloud sessions. They wrote at my desk with their notes or books spread out around them, and I sat nearby in a position where I could observe and make notes on their behavior. The protocols lasted about thirty minutes and were followed by an interview of about twenty minutes where I asked the student to tell me more about the composing process he'd just gone through. Here I saw each student at work producing the writing that he understood to be required in that situation. Building on work done by Berkenkotter (1983), Bridwell (1980), Flower and Hayes (1981), Perl (1979), and Pianko (1979), I analyzed the transcripts of protocol and interview, counting and classifying what I called the writer's conscious concerns, what he paid attention to while writing. This data gave another view into the writing situation that the student and teacher had been talking about all semester.

I called these protocols situated protocols for two reasons. First, Dave was composing aloud for a course that I had observed and had discussed all semester with both him and his teacher. Put differently, I knew the territory in which Dave's communication effort was set. And this knowledge informed my analyses of the protocol data. Thus my understanding of Dave's

protocols was situated, first, in what I knew of the classroom contexts for which he was writing. The second way in which Dave's thirty-minute protocol draft was situated was in the longer composing process actually required to complete the task. Because I followed Dave across time and collected all his written work for each assignment, I could examine what preceded and what followed the composed-aloud draft. I could thus see how the protocol draft related to Dave's entire composing process for a task.

Because these doubly-situated protocols focused on Dave's solitary struggle when confronted with a blank piece of paper, as all writers finally are, they provided essential information about his actual thinking and writing processes in each course. What the protocols revealed about Dave's composing processes generally corroborated what he had said about them in the interviews. Of particular interest, however, were the points at which the protocol data contradicted the interview data. These points spurred further inquiry. Though composing-aloud was never easy for Dave, who characterized himself as a shy person, he became more and more comfortable with it as the semesters progressed. He did produce, in each of the protocol sessions, a useful first draft for his final paper in each course.

Text Analysis. The third window through which I looked at Dave's writing experiences was text analysis. I examined the final drafts, with the teacher's comments on them, of the papers he'd begun composing during the protocol sessions. My method for analyzing these texts was based on the model of conversation proposed by language philosopher H. P. Grice (1975). Grice says that in conversation speakers share a common aim and make mutually dependent contributions: Conversation is, in short, a cooperative endeavor (1975). So, I maintain, is writing. My method of text analysis looks at the

interaction of writer and reader, just as Grice looks at the interaction of speaker and hearer, and asks how successfully have they cooperated in what might be called a semester-long conversation. In this extended "conversation," some of students' turns are taken in writing for the purpose of displaying what they understand about communication in that particular territory.

In my examination of Dave's last paper for each course, I considered both his work and the teacher's response as "conversational turns" in which the "speakers" were doing what they believed would keep the "Cooperative Principle" in force (Grice, 1975, p. 45). My classification scheme was drawn from the four categories of cooperation (quality, quantity, relation, and manner) which Grice argues speakers must fulfill if conversation is to be successful. Thus, Dave's papers provided a four- to six-page "conversational turn" in which could be seen the discourse, the content and form, that he believed he was required to display in order to be deemed cooperative in each setting. And the teacher's response showed to what extent and in what ways Dave was right. Further, each teacher's response, its form and language, yielded other valuable information about the nature of social interaction and the "ways of speaking" in that particular discipline and classroom. The analyses of texts in this study is indebted to the work of sociolinguist William Labov with oral narratives (1972) and the work of speech act theorist Mary Louise Pratt with literary "discourse" (1977). These researchers argue that texts must be described and interpreted in terms of their contexts which includes, in addition to the work itself, the reader, the writer, and the communication situation.

The text analysis data in this study, then, like the protocol data, added to and refined the picture of the classroom writing situation produced

by the ethnographic observation and interview data, and, conversely, the ethnographic data informed the work with Dave's texts. Students' and teachers' writing for each other is, finally, as fully a part of the classroom context any other activity that goes on there.

Results

The Participants and Courses

Dave Garrison was a nineteen-year-old sophomore biology major at the time of this study, a big young man, 6' 1" tall, who dressed neatly, often in corduroy slacks and a shirt or pullover sweater. He described himself as a "hands-on" person who preferred practical application in the lab to reading theory in books. He worked thirteen hours a week as a technician in a local hospital, drawing blood from patients, in addition to taking a full course load. He "loved" his hospital work, he said, because of the people and the work and also because difficulties with chemistry had made him worry about being accepted in medical school. In the hospital he was getting an idea of a range of possible careers in health care. The oldest of four children, Dave lived at home and commuted thirty minutes to Loyola. He is the first person in his family to go to college, though both of his parents enjoy reading, he said, and his father writes in his work as an insurance salesman. When Dave and I first met, he told me that he didn't really like to write and wasn't that good but that writing was a tool he knew he needed to learn to use better. By the fall of his junior year, because of a number of successful classroom experiences with writing and an ability to forget some less successful ones, Dave told me, "Writing is no problem for me. At work, in school, I just do it."

Dave's classroom speech communities are understood as being set

within the larger communities of the college and the discipline, both of which affect the ways of speaking, thinking, and writing in them and what it means to be, for example, a biologist or a literary critic. Dave's Introduction to Poetry course (English 133) is taken by all Loyola students as part of the required liberal arts "core curriculum" which comprises nearly half of their undergraduate courses. It was taught by Dr. John Forson, a literature professor at Loyola for twenty-seven years. In a lecture on writing early in the semester, Dr. Forson told students that the purpose of the course was four-fold: (1) to teach the methods and terms necessary for understanding literature as a discipline, (2) to teach critical and analytic reading, (3) to reinforce writing skills, and (4) to lay the groundwork for lifelong reading pleasure. He told them, "The three critical essays you will write will make you say something quite specific about the meaning of a poem (your thesis) and demonstrate how far you've progressed in recognizing and dealing with the devices a poet uses to express his insights." They must find the poem's meaning in the poem itself and use it to prove their thesis. "Our concern here is for the poem, not the poet's life or era. Nor are your own opinions of the poet's ideas germane."

Dr. Forson then spent about twenty minutes explaining the mechanical forms for quoting poetry, using a model essay that he had written on a poem by Seventeenth Century poet Robert Herrick. He ended by telling students that they were to see their peers as the audience for their essays and asking them not to use secondary critical sources from the library. "You'll just deal with what you now know and with the poetic devices that we discuss in class; each group of poems will feature one such device: imagery, symbolism, and so forth. These will be the tools in your tool box."

Unlike his Poetry teacher, Dave's teacher the following semester in

Cell Biology (Bio 300) was a newcomer to the Loyola faculty. Dr. Tom Kelly had taught at a large state university where, he told me, he'd become a "bureaucrat", just writing and administering grants. He came to much smaller Loyola because he wanted to spend more time teaching and actually "working at the bench" in his lab. Dr. Kelly required his Cell Biology students to write three reviews of journal articles which reported current research in the field. Students were to summarize the articles and relate them to what they were doing in class. Dr. Kelly's had students write these reviews, he said,

"because I want them to be at ease with the vocabulary of cell biology and how experiments are done. A lot of money is going into basic research in this field because of its medical and genetic engineering applications, so a great deal is being published. Students need to get a feeling for the journals, the questions people are asking, the answers they're getting, and the procedures they're using. It will give them a feeling for the excitement, the dynamic part of this field. And they need to see that what they're doing in class and lab is actually <u>used</u> out there." Dr. Kelly said that in school he had trouble learning subjects that he couldn't see applied: Latin, French, and calculus, for example.

When I asked him whom he thought his students saw as the audience for their writing, he smiled and paused for a moment. "Probably myself," he said. He then wondered if it might be their peers, but concluded that though <u>he</u> most often wrote for his peers, the students no doubt saw him as their audience. Dr. Kelly was right in Dave's case at least. In Biology and also in Poetry Dave saw his audience as the teacher in the role of examiner and said several times that he was working to "put in there what the teacher wants." This pupil-to-examiner relationship is, of course, the one that Britton says characterizes ninety per cent of school writing (1975, p. 63).

There were, however, important variations in this relationship in the two classes as we'll see below.

Thus, in both courses, Dave wrote three short papers, due at about one-month intervals, the assumption in each class being that students' early attempts would inform their subsequent ones in the sort of trial and error method that characterizes most language learning. The writing for the two courses appeared to me, on the surface, to be quite similar. Further, the type of reading required for them, the poems and the journal articles, were about equally unfamiliar to Dave. Yet Dave's success in these courses was very different. He made D's and C's in Poetry and A's in Biology. Why?

It isn't that Dave didn't work hard in Poetry. He did. He spent eleven hours on his third paper for that class, a six-page analysis of a poem called "Marriage" by contemporary poet Gregory Corso. When he handed it in, he told me that he hoped for an A or B: "I'll be really frustrated on this one if the grade's not good after I've put in the time on it." A week later, however, he told me in a resigned tone and with a short laugh that he'd gotten a C. By contrast, when he turned in his last paper in Biology on which he'd worked eight hours, a four-page review of an experiment on glycoprotein reported in The Journal of Cell Biology, he told me he knew he would get an A. When I questioned him, he replied, "I don't know how I know, I just do." And he was right: his grade was 96.

Why was Dave's success in representing to himself and producing the required writing in these two classroom communities so different? The answers to this question will illuminate some of the dimensions along which school writing situations differ and thus influence student achievement. We'll look first at how Dave perceived and produced the writing in the two courses. Second, we'll explore two social aspects of the contexts for

writing in Poetry and Biology which were never articulted, but which were very important to Dave's writing experiences and success in them.

1. How did Dave perceive and produce the writing required in Poetry and Biology?

Put differently, this question might be phrased, how did Dave view what he had to do in order to be deemed a competent communicator in these two territories? Though the writing seemed similar to me in many respects, Dave described the writing in the two courses as being totally different than each other, and both, he said, were totally different than anything he'd ever done before. And indeed the ethnographic and protocol data do reveal Dave's chief writing concerns in each class to be very different.

As he planned and composed his essay for Poetry, Dave was first of all concerned to get the right interpretation of the poem, "the true meaning" as he phrased it, and then, second, to argue that interpretation using not his own but the poet's words. His third concern was to get it all into a coherent text using the proper mechanical forms for quoting poetry. (These concerns were evidenced during the protocol session where he composed his first draft 7, 18, and 16 times respectively.) Dave told me that the poem's meaning "was there, but not there, not just what it says on the surface." And, as he wrote, Dave assumed the teacher knew that "true meaning", much as if the teacher had the answer to the riddle that Dave was trying to solve. Dave thus was concentrating on the new writing demands in this situation, the new "rules of the game" in this territory. Though he had written discursive essays before in Freshman Composition, it is no wonder that this writing seemed to Dave totally unlike anything he'd ever done before.

In Biology, like Poetry, Dave's chief concerns were with the reading, the journal article. But here, he said, "the meaning was all out on the

table." His first concern while writing was to understand the definitions of scientific terms and concepts. His second concern was to summarize them correctly, and his third was to follow in his own organization the same five-part scientific structure in which the experiement was reported, a requirement the teacher had explicitly stated. (These concerns were evidenced in the protocol drafting session 9, 22, and 12 times respectively.) Dave said that he was writing for the teacher as if the teacher had never read the article, but he supposed anyone could understand it. And again, because Dave was concentrating on the new "rules of use" in this setting, he said the writing was totally unlike anything he'd ever done before. It took one of the other student's and my prodding during an interview session to make Dave see that he had indeed written summaries before, lots of them.

Textual analysis of the teachers' responses to his papers indicate that Dave's concerns in each class matched those of his teachers, that he had figured out, at least in part, what counted as "cooperation" in those settings. Dr. Forson's endnote, eight marginal notes, and nine circles around mechanical errors all referred to failures on Dave's part to interpret the poem correctly, support his contentions adequately, or use the proper written forms for literary criticism. These were unintentional failures to fulfull the Gricean maxims of quality and manner which jeopardized the Cooperative Principle in that exchange, resulting in a C grade. Dr. Kelly responses were brief compared to Dr. Forson's: a "96" on the title page and 7 marks or brief phrases in the text pointing out small errors in form. These unintentional violations of the Gricean maxim of manner apparently did little to jeopardize the aims of the "conversation" in Biology. That Dr. Kelly's unexplained numerical grade was perfectly clear to Dave (and, in fact, predicted by him) suggests a mutual understanding of what constituted

cooperation in the Cell Biology context.

The nature of the assignments may explain in part why Dave was more successful in Biology than in Poetry. In his assignment for Poetry, Dave was called upon to take an interpretive position. This assumes that he had already summarized the poem. He had not. Thus his critical paper took the form of a summary of the poem with some interpretation along the way. He never got his own essay structure; rather he worked down the poem explicating from beginning to end. In Biology, on the other hand, the writing was supposed to be a summary that then moved to some analysis, the rather simple connecting of the summarized experiment to what was going on in class. For Dave, at least, the latter assignment was more appropriate. Novices in a field may need the simpler summary assignment which helps them understand the new reading and provides models for practicing the new language they are being asked to learn. They then may be ready to move to analysis or critique.

As Dave composed for Poetry, he was not only mentally tied to the poem. He also appeared to be almost physically attached to the Norton Anthology by his left forefinger which tenaciously held his place as he progressed down the numbers he'd marked in the poem's margin. He was, we might say, tied to the concrete material, the "facts" of the poem, before him. Similarly, as he composed the first draft of his review for Biology, Dave seemed tied to the article he was summarizing, pausing frequently to consult it, at times putting his paper on top of the lower part of the article so that his own emerging text was physically closer to what he was summarizing at that moment. This domination by the concrete often characterizes newcomers' first steps as they attempt to use language in unfamiliar academic territories (Williams, 1985).

It would be a mistake, however, to think that the structure of the writing assignments was the only reason that Dave was more successful in Biology than in Poetry. Assignments are, after all, only a small part of the classroom interaction during a semester, limited written exchanges that reflect the nature of the entire semester-long conversation. We'll now look at two unarticulated aspects of the contexts for writing in these speech communities which influenced Dave's achievement in them: (A) the functions writing served for him in each setting and (B) the roles played by participants and students' texts there.

2. Two social aspects of the contexts for writing in Poetry and Biology which affected Dave's work

A. The functions Dave saw his writing as accomplishing for him in these classes. It has been argued that the social functions served by writing in a particular situation must be seen as an intrinsic part of the writing process (Florio & Clark, 1982; Hymes, 1972a, 1972b; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Was Dave's writing in each class a meaningful social activity for him, meaningful beyond just getting him through the course? Further, did he and his teacher share an understanding of the functions that writing served in that classroom? In Biology Dave saw his writing as serving four valuable functions for him:

(1) Writing to learn the language of Cell Biology, which he saw as necessary to his career
(2) Writing to prepare him for his next semester's writing in Immunology
(3) Writing to make connections between his classwork and actual work being done by professionals in the field
(4) Writing to demonstrate academic competence

And Dave's teacher, Dr. Kelly, saw the writing in his class as serving exactly those same four functions.

On the other hand, in Poetry, though Dave's teacher stated four

functions of student's writing there, Dave saw his writing as serving only one function for him:

(1) Writing to demonstrate academic competence.

Dave, always the compliant student, did say after he had received his disappointing grade in Poetry that the writing in Poetry was probably good for him: "Probably any kind of writing helps you." And, though he may well be right, Dave actually saw his writing for Poetry as serving such a limited function--evaluation of his skills in writing poetry criticism for Dr. Forson--that he was not really convinced (and little motivated by) the notion that this writing would serve him in any general way.

Dave contended that any writing task was easy or difficult for him according to his interest in it. When I asked him what he meant by interesting, he said, "If it has something to do with my life. Like it could explain something to me or give me an answer that I could use now." Writing must have, in other words, meaningful personal and social functions for Dave if it's to be manageable, "easy", for him. These functions existed for Dave in Biology, providing the applications and personal transaction with the material that Dr. Kelly also said he needed and that may be generally required for learning and forging personal knowledge (Dewey, 1949; Polanyi, 1958). Dave's Poetry class, however, served no such personally meaningful functions. Six weeks after the Poetry course was finished, I asked Dave some further questions about his last paper for that course, the discussion of the Corso poem on which he'd worked eleven hours. He could remember almost nothing about it. When I asked him to speculate why this was, he said, "I guess it's because I have no need to remember it." By contrast, when I asked Dave in the fall of his junior year if his Cell Biology writing was serving him in his Immunology course as he had expected, he said, "Yes. The teacher

went over how to write up our labs, but most of us had the idea anyway from last semester because we'd read those journal articles. We were already exposed to it."

Of course the functions of his writing in Biology served Dave better than those in Poetry in part because he was a biology major. The writing for Cell Biology fit into a larger whole: his growing body of knowledge in this field and his professional future. The material in Cell Biology was for Dave a comprehensible part of the discipline of Biology which was in turn a comprehensible part of the sciences. Dave was, with experience, gradually acquiring a coherent sense of the language of the discipline, how biologists think and speak and what it is they talk about. And his understanding of the language of biology was accompanied by an increasing confidence in his own ability to use it. Both of these are probably necessary foundations for later, more abstract and complex uses of the language (Piaget, 1952; Perry, 1970; Williams, 1985).

In the required, one-semester Poetry class, however, the poems seemed to Dave to be unrelated to each other except for commonly used poetic devices, and his writing about them was unrelated to his own life by anything at all beyond his need to find the "true meaning" and get an acceptable grade. Dave's different relationship to the languages of these disciplines was shown when he said, "In Biology I'm using what I've <u>learned</u>. It's just putting what I've learned on paper. But in Poetry, more or less each poem is different, so it's not <u>taught</u> to you. You just have to figure it out from that poem itself and hope Dr. Forson likes it." Nor, in Poetry, was Dave ever invited to make personally meaningful connections with the poems. And he never did it on his own, no doubt in part because he was so preoccupied with the new ways of thinking and speaking that he was trying to use.

Thus the social functions that writing accomplishes for the writer in a particular situation must be seen as an intrinsic part of the writing process. Dave's writing experiences and achievements in Poetry and Biology were influenced both by the number of functions his writing served for him in each course and by the degree to which those functions were mutually understood and valued by the participants.

B. The roles played by the participants and by students' texts in Poetry and Biology. Other social aspects of these two contexts for writing which affected Dave's experiences were the roles played by the people and texts in them. Such roles are tacitly assigned in classroom interaction and create the context in which the student stranger attempts to determine the rules of language use in that territory. Here we will examine (1) Dave's role in relation to the teacher, (2) Dave's role in relation to other students in the class, and (3) the role played by students' texts there.

Dave's role in relation to the teacher. A particularly important role relationship in any classroom is that between student and teacher because it tacitly shapes the writer-audience relation that students use as they attempt to communicate appropriately in that class. In both Poetry and Biology Dave was writing for his teachers as pupil to examiner. There were, however important variations within this relationship. In Biology, both Dave and his teacher saw Dave as playing the role of newcomer, learning the language needed for initiation into the profession. His teacher played the complementary role of experienced professional who was training Dave in the ways of speaking in that discipline, ways they both assumed Dave would learn in time.

In Poetry, on the other hand, Dave played the role of outsider in

complementary relationship to his teacher, the insider who knew the true meanings of poetry. And Dave stayed the outsider. And because that role was not a pleasant one for him, he seemed to separate his thinking from his writing in that class, saying several times that he had the right ideas; the teacher just didn't like the way he wrote them.

Dave's role in relationship to other students in these classes. Students' relationships with each other, like those between students and teachers, are created as students interact within the classroom structures the teacher has set up. These classroom stuctures grow out of teachers' explicit and tacit notions about writing and learning. What specifically were the relationships among students in Biology and Poetry?

In neither of these courses was time actually built into the class for students to talk with each other about their writing. Dave lamented this early in his sophomore year as he wrote for Poetry because, he said, he now realized how valuable the small group sessions had been in Freshman Composition the semester before. That was the first time Dave had ever talked with other students about his writing, and it not only helped him with his writing, it dignified student writing for him and elevated his estimation of himself as a writer.

In Biology, Dave told me, students did talk informally about the journal articles they had selected and how they were progressing on their summaries. Dr. Kelly, who circulated during lab, was at times included in these informal talks about writing. And it's no surprise that students discussed their writing in this way in Biology in light of Dr. Kelly's notions about writing. It is, he believes, an essential part of what scientists do. He told me that it often comes as a rude shock to students that the way biologists survive in the field is by writing. He said, "These

students are bright, and they can memorize piles of facts, but they're not yet good at writing. They know what science is," he told me, "but they don't know what scientists do." Thus, writing up research results is seen by Dr. Kelly as an integral part of a biologist's lab work. No wonder his students talked about it.

In Poetry, however, there was little talk of any kind among students. Classes were primarily lectures where Dr. Forson explicated poems and explained poetic devices. Only occasionally did he call on one of the twenty-two students for an explication. And this lack of student interaction in Poetry was in line with the image of the writer that Dr. Forson described for students, an image that may be widely shared in literary studies: A person alone with his or her books and thoughts. Dr. Forson did, however, tell students that he himself often got his ideas for writing from listening to himself talk about poems in class. Yet, in conversation with me, he said that he didn't want students discussing the poems and their writing with each other because he feared they wouldn't think for themselves. And Dave picked up on this idea very clearly. It wasn't until the fall of his junior year that he admitted to me that he and his girlfriend, who was in that same class, had worked together on their papers. They had discussed the interpretations of the poems and how they might best write them, but, he told me, they had been very careful to choose different poems to write about so that Dr. Forson wouldn't know they'd worked together. This absence of student interaction in Poetry and Dave's apparent negative feelings about working with another student may have contributed to the outsider role that he played in that class.

Throughout this study I was amazed at the amount of talk that goes on all the time outside class among students as they do their research work to

"figure out" the writing requirements in various courses. What Dave's experience in Poetry may suggest is that where student collaboration in writing is not openly accepted, it goes on clandestinely.

The roles played by students' texts in these classes. What were students' texts called and how were they handled? By that I mean physically handled as well as handled in the sense of managed. Students' texts were treated quite differently in Biology and Poetry, and this affected the ways Dave saw the assignments and, perhaps more important, how he saw himself as writer.

In Biology Dave wrote what he referred to as "reviews;" in Poetry he wrote "papers." This latter term is one we all use, of course, but it is one that Janet Emig says suggests a low status text (1983, p. 173): "Paper"--as if there were no words on the sheet at all. In Poetry the high status texts, the ones that were discussed and interpreted, were the poems. Students' works were just more or less successful explications of those. Furthermore, in Poetry the one model critical essay the students read was written by the teacher. And though students were told they should think of their peers as their audience, in fact they never read each others' essays at all. Students' texts were, rather, passed only between student and teacher as in a private conversation.

In Biology, student texts enjoyed a higher status. Excellent student reviews were posted and students were encouraged to read them; they were to serve as models. Some student writers were thus defined as competent speakers in this territory, and the message was clear to Dave: This was a language that he too could learn given proper time and training.

Discussion

From the story of Dave's writing over several semesters, we cannot, of course, generalize to all college students or even to all Loyola students. This would contradict my notion of what writing is--a social, context-dependent language activity. What, then, can we learn from Dave's experiences? First, this study adds to existing research which suggests that school writing is not a monolithic activity or global skill (Calkins, 1980; Clark & Florio, 1983; Graves, 1978; Herrington, 1985; Kantor, 1984; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Rather, the contexts for writing vary so widely from one classroom to another, the ways of speaking in them so diverse, the social meanings of writing and the interaction patterns so different from one to another, that they may be for the student writer like so many foreign countries. These differences were apparent not only in the student's perceptions of the courses but in his concerns while writing and in his written products.

Second, this study suggests that when we ask what students learn from and about writing in classrooms and why, we must look not only at particular assignments or students' written products, we must also look at what they learn from the social contexts those classrooms provide for writing. For Dave in Biology, writing was an important part of a socialization process; he was the newcomer being initiated into a profession in which, he learned, writing counts for a great deal. From his writing in Poetry, Dave learned that reading poetry was not for him and that he could get through anything. This latter is a lesson not without its value, of course, but it's not one that teachers hope to teach with their writing assignments.

Third, this study raises questions for teachers of writing and teachers in the disciplines about how they can best help student "strangers" to understand and use the new languages in unfamiliar academic territories.

Because all writing is context-dependent, and because successful writing requires the accurate assessment of and adaptation to the demands of particular writing situations, perhaps writing teachers should be explicitly training students in this assessment process, training them, that is, to be researchers of writing. And for teachers in the disciplines who, like native speakers in their territories, may have used the language of their discipline for so long that it's partially invisible to them, the first challenge will be to appreciate just how foreign and difficult it is for student newcomers. They must then provide these students with writing experiences which are appropriate first steps for learning and using the new language of their community. And this task may well be more difficult when the student stranger is only on a brief visit in an academic territory as Dave was in Poetry. To better understand the process of achieving competence in an academic speech community, we need further research. What are its stages, and what characterizes students' writing processes and products at each stage? Studies which examine students at various points in their socialization process and studies which, like the present one, follow a single student across time will offer useful insights.

As Dave researched the writing requirements in his classrooms, he drew upon five information sources in a process that was for him largely tacit and unarticulated. These five sources, all of which were mentioned above, were (1) his teachers' explicit and implicit communications about the writing in their classrooms, (2) written texts and models of various sorts, (3) his talk with other students, (4) his teacher's and others' spoken and written responses to his writing attempts, and (5) his prior experience. In terms of his potential for success in this "figuring out" process, Dave was in a priviledged position. He had, of course, had years of practice writing

in classrooms. Furthermore, he shared not only ethnic and class backgrounds with his teachers, but also many assumptions about education. Students from diverse communities may need, even more than Dave, explicit training in the ways in which one figures out and then adapts to the writing demands in academic contexts.

Ethnographic studies like the present one, Geertz says, are only "another country heard from. . . nothing more or less." Yet, "small facts speak to large issues" (1973, p. 23). From Dave's story, and others like it which describe actual writers at work in local settings, we will learn more about writers' processes and texts and how these are constrained by specific social dynamics and cultural situations. Our generalizations and theories must, in the final analysis, be closely tied to concrete social events and occasions. They must be based on many small "countries heard from." If they are not so based, they are likely to be not only abstruce, "sociological aestheticisms" (Geertz, 1973, p. 30), but also mistaken.

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DATA COLLECTION RECORD

	Freshman Comp Spring, 1983	Poetry Fall, 1983	Cell Biology Spring, 1984	Jr. Yr. Follow-up Fall, 1984
Ethnographic participant-observation in classrooms	9 weeks of 14-week semester 90 min. per wk	Observed one 90-min. lecture on writing	Observed 1 lab session for 15 minutes	
Ethnographic interviews w/ teachers and students	Frequent interviews w/ teacher & students during 9 wks. total many hrs.	2 interviews w/ teacher = 1 hr. 4 hr-long interviews w/ the 3 students	2 interviews w/ teacher = 2 hrs. 3 hr-long interviews w/ the 3 students. 1 hr-long interview w/ Dave	1 hr-long interview w/ Dave. 1 hr-long interview with the 3 students
30-minute composing-aloud protocols with 30-minute interviews	On 1st draft of 4th essay	On 1st draft of 3rd (last) critical essay	On 1st draft of 3rd (last) review of journal article	
Text Analysis	Of 4th essay and teacher's written responses	Of 3rd (last) paper and teacher's responses	Of 3rd (last) review and teacher's responses	